New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1951

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Theatre Openings

"Saint Joan"

"Remains To Be Seen"

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Saint Joan"

The New York Times

October 5, 1951

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Eighteen years ago Shaw's "Saint Joan" seemed like an inspired play. There is no reason to change that opinion now. For the performance with Uta Hagen, which opened at the Cort last evening, brings us the first top-flight work of the season and makes the theatre something worth venerating again. The original "Saint Joan" in New York was a Theatre Guild production. The current version, brilliantly directed by Margaret Webster, is also presented by the Theatre Guild, which has become itself again. In every respect life looks a lot brighter in this neighborhood.

Doubtless there is more than one way to play the part of Saint Joan. New York has seen Winifred Lenihan and Katharine Cornell in that role, and liked both of them very much. But none of the ways is better than Miss Hagen's radiant simplicity. For Joan was a peasant and Miss Hagen has not forgotten her origin for an instant. Without being literal, her portrait is honest. She is less interested in the part than the character; she does not decorate it with any theatrical designs that divert interest from Joan's personality and soul.

* * *

When Miss Hagen was playing the doomed Blanche in "A Streetcar Named Desire," her method for attacking the part became most effective in the last half when the ideas she had planted began to blossom. The same thing is true of her Joan. Apart from their candor, magnetism and loveliness, the early scenes may not seem remarkable. But the truths she establishes in the beginning are the ones that seem overpoweringly noble and sublime in the trial scene and in the beautiful epilogue.

Joan is a lovable and admirable young lady when she bravely defies her counselors and supporters in the Cathedral at Rheims. But the Joan dragged into the ecclesiastical court to be tried for heresy is a girl entitled to adoration, for the purity of her spirit; and the Joan of the epilogue is a saint. There is nothing mystic about Miss Hagen's acting. It is the portrait of a native girl still close to the soil but inspired by God's voices; and the terrible truths of Shaw's play become terribly moving on that basis.

Most of us probably will agree that the play is needlessly loquacious. There is something soporific about the middle scenes. But no one except Shaw could have understood so thoroughly the intellectual issues at stake in the ordeal of Joan, and no one else could have dramatized so sharply the forces that made her martyrdom inevitable. Neither the church nor the state, both elaborately intellectualized by law, interest or dogma, could tolerate the inspired simplicity of this maid who communicated with God directly.

* * *

To most of us in 1923, the astonishing thing about "Saint Joan," however, was the strength of Shaw's religious faith. It is not so surprising today, since he gave many indications of it in his later years. But the faith, founded on reason, is still the glory of "Saint Joan."

Miss Webster admires the play as well as she understands it. The performance is lucid, animated and sensitive to Shaw's meanings. For scenery Richard Harrison Senie has provided an excellent series of arches, forms, drapes and furnishings that house the performance without impeding it, all in a style that the theatre could afford to emulate more. Elinor Robbins' costumes are vivid, without being pompous. The décor of this "Saint Joan" is good for the acting.

And the acting is superb all the way through. All the points of view are illustrated with strength, clarity and conviction by actors who know what they are doing. Andrew Cruickshank's cunning, polished and unscrupulous Earl of Warwick; John Buckmaster's querulous Dauphin; Robert Pastene's courageous and friendly Dunois; Alexander Scourby's fanatical Bishop of Beauvais; Frederick Rolf's conscientious and compassionate Inquisitor and Frederic Worlock's worldly Archbishop of Rheims—are parts played with distinction.

The play is inspired. Neither Miss Hagen nor her associates let it down. They know that Shaw's soul has lightened up this moving drama that is pitched on a high spiritual plane.

"SAINT JOAN"

Play by Bernard Shaw; staged by Margaret Webster; settings by Richard Harrison Senie; costumes by Elinor Robbins; score by Lehman Engel; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Cort Theatre, October 4, 1951. The cast:

Robert de Baudricourt..... James Daly
His Steward.... Burton Mallory
Joan..... Uta Hagen
Bertrand de Poulengey..... Preston Hanson
The Archbishop of Rheims... Frederic Worlock
The Duke de la Trenouille... Norman Roland
A Page..... Joseph Dooley
Giles de Rais..... Frederic Warriner
Capt. la Hire... Paul Ballantyne
The Dauphin.. John Buckmaster
Duchess de la Tremouille... Sylvia Farnham
Dunois..... Robert Pastene
Page to Dunois..... Tom Hughes Sand
The Earl of Warwick..... Andrew Cruickshank
John de Stogumber... Dion Allen
Peter Cauchon..... Alexander Scourby
Page to Warwick.. Tarry Green
The Inquisitor... Frederick Rolf
Canon D'Estivet.... John Straub
Brother Martin Ladvenu.... Kendall Clark
The Executioner.. Preston Hanson

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 5, 1951

By Bert McCord

A New Maid of Orleans

Considered by many to be one of Bernard Shaw's best, if not his finest play, "Saint Joan" was revived last night at the Cort Theater where Margaret Webster's production was presented by the Theater Guild. Certainly few plays are more deserving of a revival, nor more rewarding. It finds Shaw in brilliant form, rolling out wave after wave of ideas, expressed with caustic and pungent wit and contained in a succession of seven colorful and dramatic scenes. It is great theater and should be witnessed by all who are interested in the theater and believe that it can be great.

Is it a great "Saint Joan"? The question is asked not in terms of comparison. But is the tremendous effort of the playwright realized in the present production? Reluctantly, it must be admitted that this playgoer feels that the answer is "No." As it unfolded on the stage of the Cort last evening, "Saint Joan" was extremely interesting, even exciting at times. It was also absorbing for the most part, but it was not moving. And this of all of Shaw's plays, is the one which should reach the hearts as well as the minds of its audience.

* * *

Because it is in the main a first-class production, the reasons why it fails to accomplish the ultimate of Shaw's aim are difficult to diagnose. They lie, I suspect, in the lack of overtones in the title performance and, secondarily, in the inadequate casting of several of the key roles. As the Maid of Orleans, Uta Hagen does an extremely capable and workmanlike job. She has approached the role realistically, even as Shaw conceived and wrote it. She accents the human qualities of the girl and shies away from any temptation to glamorize the character. And yet she succeeds only in being convincing. She is rarely inspiring. The performance itself is well-paced and sure, but does not attain the magic that once has a right to expect from the girl who inspired the beaten French soldiers to raise the siege of Orleans and drive out the English.

It is John Buckmaster, as the weak and cowardly Dauphin, who steals the show. This is a delectable role, to be sure, and one which can hardly fail to be a standout. Even so, it is a joy to behold what Mr. Buckmaster does with it. And unhappily, it makes many of the other performances pale by the enforced comparison. By way of illustration, Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais, must rank as one of Shaw's finest characterizations, but you would never suspect it from last night's performance. Apparently incapable of mastering the magnificent Shavian prose, Alexander Scourby makes of him little more than a blustering, Mephistophelian villain.

* * *

It was fortunate indeed that Andrew Cruickshank was on hand as the Earl of Warwick, otherwise the splendid tent scene would have gone by the boards entirely. For neither Cauchon, nor the Chaplain (played by Dion Allen), were able to act up to this scene, which finds Shaw excelling at his own specialty, the dramatizing of ideas. Only Mr. Cruickshank was able to live the character and express the ideas, without letting the one obstruct the other. Also on the credit side is the fine performance of Robert Pastene as Dunois. It is in her scenes with him—on the banks of the Loire before Orleans and in the Cathedral of Rheims—that Miss Hagen is at her best.

The Guild has not stinted on the production, which is sumptuous and effective. There is no quarrel with the actual staging, but it must be remembered that it is the director who is responsible for the casting of the roles referred to above, not to mention the Inquisitor, who must set and virtually dominate the scene. All in all, it must be stated that discriminating theatergoers have a right to expect more from a production of "Saint Joan," but since Shaw himself provided so much to begin with and since the play is not made available often enough, this one can easily be considered a worthwhile theatrical investment.

DAILY NEWS

October 5, 1951

Guild Revives Shaw's 'Saint Joan'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

This morning's thanks from this department go to the Theatre Guild for having presented, last evening at the Cort Theatre, a play which gives this already aging stage season its first touch of class. The drama is Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan," with Uta Hagen in the title role.

Shaw was the winner, as usual, for he was a dramatist who would not let an actor top him. He diabolically laid structural and verbal booby traps which kept his actors skittish and off balance and sometimes even destroyed them. Very few actors have had as many victories over GBS as has Maurice Evans, and I don't think Miss Hagen is entirely triumphant as the Maid of Domremy. Her performance is evidence of her fine intelligence and her admirable technical equipment, but it does not convey to me the passion and the zeal of a true saint.

Epiloque a Handicap.

Last night's "Saint Joan" was Shaw's, whereas in the last previous production of the play, in 1936, it was Katharine Cornell's. Even so, a Shaw "Joan" is quite something — three hours of clear and corrosive discussion of faith and heresy—and of political necessities. The drama always was too long, and its epilogue of doubtful interest and effect. It has seemed to many besides myself that the epilogue, in which Joan and all her friends and inquisitors return to earth in 1920, lessens the spiritual and dramatic force of the play proper. The point of the epilogue is that, were Joan to return in this century, she'd be burned again. It's a typically Shavian point and rather clownish, and it is rather tiresomely overwritten.

The physical production of the new Guild offering is attractive but not dramatically impressive. The simple sets are by Richard Harrison Senie, the more successful costumes by Elinor Robbins. The direction, by Margaret Webster, tends to make the play a set of speeches rather than a cumulative drama.

Well Spoken.

But these speeches are by Shaw, who is better than the combined authors of "Bagels and Yok" and "Remains to Be Seen." And they are very well done. Among the stalwarts of a big company are Andrew Cruickshank, who plays the Earl of Warwick as though he were Winston Churchill; John Buckmaster as a fussy Dauphin; Robert Pastene as Joan's fighting friend, the Bastard of Orleans; Frederick Worlock as the Archbishop of Rheims, and Frederick Rolf as a gentle but terrible inquisitor. Miss Hagen's finest scene is, as it should be, the cumulative one of the inquisition.

"Saint Joan' is a play worthy of the metropolitan stage, and the Guild should be admired for reviving it.

New York Post

October 5, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

Quibbling About a Masterpiece

Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" is bound to give honor and importance to any season in which it is presented. It is a noble and magnificent play, the most distinguished dramatic work of its eminent author, and one of the greatest achievements of modern writing for the theater. But it was my impression last night that the Theater Guild's new production of this authentic masterpiece, which opened at the Cort, was, while competent, curiously lacking in distinction, even though it was staged by the able Margaret Webster and offered in its title role Uta Hagen, one of the oncoming actresses of the American stage.

I was happy to see this monumental drama again, and there is much in the presentation worthy of praise, but it does seem to me that it is, on the whole, a rather routine performance of a work that calls for greatness. Miss Hagen is a talented player, and her Joan is sincere, straightforward and, to use the word again, competent. But it lacks the brilliance and, if I may say so, the spiritual exaltation that the role calls for, and, while it is a touching portrayal, it is rarely a deeply moving or impressively beautiful characterization. Where grandeur is demanded, only adequacy is provided.

Its Difficulties

Obviously, "Saint Joan" is an enormously difficult drama to present properly. As a play, all sorts of things are wrong with it. It is too long, it repeats itself, it has its share of theatrical cliches, and it has a long epilogue, which, while interesting enough, is both anti-climactic and rather unnecessary. Unless it is superbly done, it can seem incredibly wordy. It merely happens that, in addition to its perversities, it possesses a true magnificence of thought, emotion and creative imagination. It requires unusual excellence in a large number of parts to bring out its very genuine greatness.

The current presentation has some undeniably good performances. John Buckmaster is first-rate as the weak and frightened Dauphin, and Alexander Scourby, always an effective actor, is excellent as that honest and well-meaning monster of intolerance, Bishop Cauchon. The interesting part of John de Stogumber, the English priest who persecutes Joan and then cannot bear to see her suffer, comes to life only in the later moments, but in those final scenes it is well played by Dion Allen. And Andrew Cruickshank has some good moments as the wily Earl of Warwick, even though he is not always properly impressive.

The Inquisitor

On the whole the acting is unfortunately lacking in force and style. For example, the Inquisitor, whose keen logic and skilled reasoning lead him to perpetrate an abominable injustice, is one of the great roles of dramatic literature, but it loses most of its force and point in the colorless playing of Frederick Rolf. The long speech of the stern cleric, with its superb defense of the most cruel intolerance, is the key point of the play, and here it seems to me almost completely wasted. The trial and condemnation of Joan make for drama that cannot fail, but only a part of it emerges in the present production.

"Saint Joan" is a drama of profound and provocative ideas, and it combines thought, emotion and satirical incisiveness in the deftest and most brilliant amalgamation that Bernard Shaw ever achieved. Even passably well done, it is a work of superb stature. And, as I have tried to say, the current presentation captures enough of the quality of the work to enable anyone to see that he is watching a masterpiece. The regrettable thing is that Miss Webster's production emphasizes the minor weaknesses rather than the mighty virtues of a great play. It is not a botch, but I did find it a disappointment.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 5, 1951

Uta Hagen's 'Joan' Fragile, Compelling

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Compared to most plays, Shaw's "Saint Joan" ranks the same way a 12 course dinner by Escoffier would to a ham sandwich. It is filled with wit and wisdom and passion, in a mixture rich in quantity and quality.

Shaw tells how the Maid wins her armies, leads them to victory, is betrayed, condemned and burned, then finally returns to find that though she is canonized, the world could still not accept her alive.

Vastly Compelling.

With brilliant argument Shaw tells how the simple ardor of the Maid imperils the Church and the State of her day, at the cost of her life.

Uta Hagen is starred as Joan, and it is a performance befitting the great play. Applying Shavian paradox to her interpretation, she makes the girl believable by permitting her no counterpart in everyday nature.

There is nothing lyrical about this Joan. She borders on the loutish. She is composed of the wildest extremes of exaltation and innocence. In a combination of crude physical fragility and titanic spirit, this Maid is vastly compelling.

One of the Greatest.

Miss Hagen has that rare gift of creating spiritual energy in the theater, then controlling it at will. She has the authority to compel an audience into silent attention like suspended animation. Unquestionably she is among the theater's greatest in her day.

In many ways Margaret Webster has reached a new peak in her directorial activity with this production. She creates emotional and intellectual tensions prescribed by the author, so the play's long tour of argument is vitally absorbing, right up to its verbose epilogue.

The play gets elegant texture from striking sets and fine costumes. The biting score of Lehman Engel commands and inspires, suggesting endless cathedral spaces.

Cast Is Fine.

That the performances vary in quality is perhaps inevitable, but it is also the cause of the performance's not soaring more often than it does. Variety of acting style and speech occasionally demands a generous imagination on the onlooker's part. When the performers are good, they are solid as rock.

Outstanding are Andrew Cruickshank and Alexander Scourby as symbols of temporal and secular power. John Buckmaster does the best job of his career as the weak Dauphin, Robert Pastene is thankfully plain and impelling as the long loyal Dunois, and Kendall Clark projects great dignity and compassion as Brother Martin.

Journal-American

October 5, 1951

Bernard Shaw Star Of His Own Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

Of the current revival of "Saint Joan" at the Cort, the third professional production here in New York where it was originally performed, Bernard Shaw is obviously the star. Now, more than before, it is evident that the playwright wrote better than we know. His First Protestant, as he called his Maid of Doremy, is very much a heroine.

I have always complained, the last time as late as the August of this year, that the American-made Saint Joans are not as earthy as they should be, as one-track minded. I know that Katherine Cornell was not fifteen years ago. I think that Winifred Lenihan was not in 1923. And if I saw Julia Arthur at all, she left no lasting impression.

Last night, Uta Hagen's Saint Joan intended to be earthy. And, once in a while, it almost was. But, more often than not, it was the earthiness of Margaret Webster, the director, rather than the earthiness of Bernard Shaw or Noah Webster. Or even Miss Hagen. If the erstwhile Blanche du Bois-into-Georgie Elgin had been left to her own devices—

But she was not left to her own devices and her acting was not as earthy as I had hoped it would be. I liked it well enough, I guess. But it was not the Joan of Arc I have, since 1923, wanted to see. Sybil Thorndyke remains on top for her London impersonation. And she was not too perfect, not even with Bernard Shaw yelling "Bravo!"

• • •

Yes, in "Saint Joan" Bernard Shaw wrote better than we knew. Burns Mantle, selecting the "best plays" of 1923-1924, did not pick this one at all. Instead, he found it an "unlifelike... discussion of the miracle days when the Maid of Doremy led her mystified followers to victory." "The Show-Off" was that season's "finest."

But, of all the Shavian output, this "chronical play," as it was then styled, has proven the most durable. Superficially, it tells a simple and direct story. From Vaucouleurs to Chinon, where Joan of Arc picks out the Dauphin. She sees the wind change near Orleans; Charles crowned at Rheims. She is tried at Rouen: burned at the stake.

Then the in-and-out-and-in-again epilogue in which all those having to do with her life reappear in the spirit on the anniversary of her canonization. They beg her to remain dead. And a saint! If she were to return to life she probably would again be slain by a stupid world. "Probably" is Mr. Mantle's word!

This episode has always been "Saint Joan's" stumbling block, both in this country and in England. The fault is largely Bernard Shaw's. It is not as even as the other scenes. Or as well written. Although it has great wisdom, great tolerance and great understanding, it can crack like a stained glass window.

• • •

It cracked more than once last night in 48th Street. And, even when it remained intact, it was not always as well played as it could be. It let, as has previously been the case, "Saint Joan" down. It does not mean to, but it does. It has to be, it can not help but be contemporary. Joan of Arc has been a saint only thirty-one years.

Of this revival's individual performances, that of John Buckmaster as the Dauphin is the most consistantly praiseworthy. Next is the Earl of Warwick according to Andrew Cruickshank. Alexander Scourby makes a memorable Peter Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais. And James Daly, a Daniel Blum award-winner, is admirable as Robert de Baudricourt.

Which, I suppose, leads me to the Saint Joan of Uta Hagen. There I am puzzled. She is earthy, I realize. But she is not earthy as I think she should be. The earthiness, which the Maid of Doremy so calls for does not come—or seem to come—from a saint-in-the-making. There is no immortality about Miss Hagen. Not even Protestant!

This is why Bernard Shaw is obviously the star of the current revival in 49th Street. He, who has said that "Saint Joan" is the easiest play he ever wrote, is on the cover of the programs and the mind of everybody in attendance. His "chronicle play" is, of course, a show piece. It turns up also as a very neat attempt to write a masterpiece.

Daily Mirror

October 5, 1951

Uta Hagen in Lackluster Performance of 'St. Joan'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Theatre Guild brought Uta Hagen to the Cort Theatre last evening in Margaret Webster's production of George Bernard Shaws' "Saint Joan." Over the years, we were under the impression that this was by all odds the best of the modern master's scripts. But now we aren't so sure.

The Guild and Miss Webster have assembled a large cast of excellent players to support Miss Hagen. It all should add up to an exciting, a stimulating evening in the theatre, yet somehow it doesn't. It just seems run-of-the-mill, pedestrian Shaw. And a very hot night added nothing to our pleasure.

Miss Hagen is a fine young actress. She gave an outstanding performance in "The Country Girl" last season. But her portrayal of the hapless Maid of Orleans failed to glow, and a tricky little squeak in her voice proved distracting. But she was lovely to look at.

John Buckmaster was first rate as the craven Dauphin enthroned and turned into a courageous fighter by Joan of Arc. Buckmaster is becoming one of our better interpreters of Shavian roles. He was outstanding in "Caesar and Cleopatra" and "Getting Married." Andrew Cruickshank acted the Earl of Warwick with a wry wit and bite. He is a most welcome visitor from England.

It's good to have Frederic Warlock back with us as the Archbishop of Rheims. Warlock can run the gamut, from drawing-room comedy to Ibsen, and may always be depended upon for a top-flight performance. And there are helpful contributions by Alexander Scourby, Robert Pastene, Frederic Warriner, Frederick Rolf, Dion Allen and Kendall Clark.

We saluted Pastene as an actor of promise several Summers ago, and he is fulfilling our predictions.

The sets by Richard Harrison Senie and the costumes by Elinor Robbins are eye-filling. Incidental music by Lehman Engel, we thought a hindrance rather than an aid. Such original scores, when supplied with classics, tend to be blaring bores.

We should like to see Miss Hagen in "Saint Joan" again, particularly on a cooler evening. Perhaps she just had an off night at the premiere. She's much too gifted a player to give consistently such a lack luster performance as the one we caught.

"Remains To Be Seen"

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

October 4, 1951

'Remains' a Smash, So's Janis Paige

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Remains To Be Seen" looks like just about as prophetic a title as anybody ever thought up. This new comic mystery by that pair of hepcats, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, is destined for a long, happy life at the Morosco.

The show is a neat and rollicking job. But it is also a blessed event, in that it brings a girl and a part together in the happiest union we have seen in years and years. Janis Paige is going to have the town at her melodic feet, if it is not already there by today.

She plays what is known in the music profession as a girl vocalist. For the purpose of the show she is out of her element, having been called away from a tour of one-night stands through Kansas, to come to see about a legacy in New York.

Has a Rough Time.

Her benefactor, an uncle she hates, is dead with a carving knife in his corpse by the time she arrives. She spends a rough night escaping with her own life, while she tries to hold onto her old job via long distance telephone, and coincidentally win a shy gent who is a whiz on the trap drums.

Miss Paige is one of the most refreshing sights in ages, as this uninhibited redhead, throwing her figure around, lets go with a song or two and wins hearts young and old.

She is what John Held Jr. unquestionably would use as his 1951 model. This dame is youth and fire and energy and kindness and determination in a crazy mixture. Whatever Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse planned on, they got double measure when they cast Janis Paige in this role.

Finely Tailored Show.

It is a finely tailored show, with several of the cutest curtains ever dreamed up. Last night's audience took to the first act with a certain amount of caution, missing laughs which will have less self-conscious crowds roaring. The trick of the first act curtain would jolt anybody into a good humor, and after that the premiere house was entirely joyful. By the end of the eveninng the customers were as hysterical as the actors on stage where a riot was going on.

The play has all the traditional wonders of mysteries, the sliding panels, dimmed lights, screams and hair-breadth escapes. But it is always foremost a comedy, as laughter aquaplanes over shocks.

Jackie Cooper proves himself a trouper by actively stooging for the redhead as the modest would-be drummer. He is proper but a good sport. He offers professionals rich competition on a fantastically elaborate set of drums.

Co-author Howard Lindsay has a major part in the onstage proceedings as a lawyer who falls for the singer. The role is straight and Mr. Lindsay plays it legitimately, so as to give the whole play balance.

If this season seemed slow getting on the right track, it was worth it to have a royal sendoff like "Remains To Be Seen."

"REMAINS TO BE SEEN"

Comedy by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse; staged by Bretaigne Windust; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented by Leland Hayward at the Morosco Theatre, October 3, 1951. The cast:

Edward Miller.....Karl Lukas
Benjamin Goodman.....Howard Lindsay
Dr. Charles Gresham.....Warner Anderson
Waldo Walton...Jackie Cooper
Dr. Chester Delapp..Ross Hertz
Robert Clark.....Alexander Lockwood
Fred Fleming...Joseph Latham
Tony Minetti..Frank Campanella
Morris Rosenberg..Paul Lipson
Jody Revere.....Janis Paige
Hideo Hayakawa.....Harry Shaw Lowe
Valeska Chauvel.....Madeleine Morka
Al.....Ossie Davis
Lt. Casey.....Kirk Brown
Detective Davis....Hugh Rennie
Detective Watson.....Jonathan Brewster
Detective Weiner...Lew Herbert
Patrolman Johnson..John Bouie
Mrs. Bright.....Edith Bell

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in the living room of the Park Ave. apartment of Travis Revercombe. Act I. Scene 1. Evening, shortly after 10 o'clock. Scene 2. Later that night. Act II. Scene 1. The following afternoon. Scene 2. Late that night. Act III. Half an hour later.

The New York Times

October 4, 1951

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse Have Written a Mystery-Comedy Entitled 'Remains to Be Seen'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

In "Remains to Be Seen," which opened at the Morosco last evening, Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse are in a boyish mood. This remark is not intended as praise. For the authors of "Life With Father" and "Life With Mother" are mature people now and can safely put their boyish ideas away.

"Remains to Be Seen" is offered as a mystery-comedy. Before the curtain rises a fairly odious millionaire has either died or been killed—much to the relief of everyone who knew him. To Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse this mortuary incident is only the entrance into a comic rumpus involving a girl singer from a cheap band in the Middle West and an apartment house manager in New York who is an amateur drummer.

* * *

These centrifugal, irrelevant low-comedy routines can be very funny when the material is genuinely comic and the story spontaneous. It would be hard to say exactly why Joseph Kesselring's "Arsenic and Old Lace," put on by Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse, was hilarious, although "Remains to Be Seen" is tasteless and labored. The two plays are not unalike in style and form.

But when a play of this sort does not gather momentum as it goes along and build up a cyclone of laughter, it looks embarrassingly frantic. It looks as though it were made up of incidents that do not belong together and cannot be made to lead from one natural crisis to another.

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The authors have driven their comedy so hard that it is gasping most of the time; and the performance, under Bretaigne Windust's direction, is humorlessly noisy, desperate and tiresome. Janis Paige plays the part of the Middle Western singer with a lot of energetic clowning, but with no apparent talent. As the amateur drummer, Jackie Cooper is more amusing; he does not hit one note so monotonously all evening. But the part is not much better than Miss Paige's part, and the effect is not exactly uproarious.

Inside Raymond Sovey's useful and pleasing setting a lot of actors keep running and shouting for their livelihood. Only one of them is really amusing. Mr. Lindsay, throwing down his pen, has cast himself as a solemn man of law of middle years who is dazzled and delighted by the brassiness of the extroverted blond singer. His transition from gravity to a sort of simpering amorousness is about the only funny element in the show. In the midst of the bedlam he is subdued and entertaining, and subtly provides an ironic comment on some of the stuff he has helped to write.

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In the flush of their youth Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse once wrote a dismal cartoon of burlesque theatre, which they labeled "Strip for Action." They had young ideas in that one, too—pretty distressing, on the whole. Their mature work includes "Life With Father," which was one of the most memorable folk comedies we have had, and "Life With Mother," which was a finer work. If the public had received "Life With Mother" as affectionately as it took its predecessor to its bosom, Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse might not now be squandering their talents on a sophomoric escapade like "Remains to Be Seen." With some difficulty this column refrains from making a mean pun out of the title.

Journal American

October 4, 1951

Showmanship Better Than Playwriting

By ROBERT GARLAND

If "Remains to be Seen" represents anything, it represents the triumph of showmanship over playwriting. The "new comedy" Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse have manufactured, that Leland Hayward is selling at the Morosco, goes along after getting off to an uncertain start. Everybody does bettter than the dramatists.

In a setting by Raymond Sovey, under direction by Bretaigne Windust, the playwriting gradually gives way to the showmanship. And, after its fashion, "Remains to be Seen" grows not unfascinating to behold. It becomes opportunistic; it takes hold of each passing twist and turn. Many are serviceable, if not original.

Then the cast knows what it does. Janis Paige, as the leading lady, is almost as right as the press agent claims. Although no great actress, and easier on the camera's than the human eye, she represents no night-club singer to be ashamed of. And Jackie Cooper, opposite her, is a genial janitor to marry.

Gradually, they get together —Miss Paige and Mr. Cooper— and carry on. Contrived as their doings are, the youngsters are rather fun to watch as they dress and undress, scare and unscare, love and are loved throughout the evening. Backed by a worthy cast, "Remains to be Seen" may be in the Broadway bag.

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It calls for more time than I can afford to retell the plots made use of. They range from a who-done-it to a love-story. While all is told, a boy loves a girl, a man is killed, a drum is beaten. A "Fanny Hill" is read, a wall is opened, a light goes out, a light goes on, a cop faints and everything you ever heard of happens.

Through these made-to-order happenings, Janis Paige as Jody Revere and Jackie Cooper as Waldo Walton, fall in love with one another. Jody is a singer with a night-club band and Waldo is a janitor—beg pardon, a superintendent—of an apartment house down by the railroad tracks under New York City.

They get together by way of a while-there's-a-will-there's-a-play. That is still another plot and not to be gone into here. Suffice it to relate, boy does meet girl, girl does meet boy, and they do get together. He does get a job with his loved one's band by playing over the telephone at two o'clock in the morning.

If this sounds mixed up and confusing, it sounds mixed-up at the Morosco. Karl Lukas, Ossie Davis, Kirk Brown, Hugh Rennie and even Mr. Lindsay assist in the goings-on until the final word is spoken, the final curtain falls and hero and heroine are on their way to happiness.

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Janis Paige is featured first among the players. Why, I cannot exactly tell. Except that she looks like a night-club singer, is a night-club singer and may be a night-club singer after the run of "Remains to be Seen" is over. She works hard and there is nothing definitely to complain of in her working.

Jackie Cooper—a big boy now, why is he not called Jack? —is Waldo Walton. He can even beat a drum. And he goes through the proceedings with a proper seriousness. If the result neither adds nor subtracts from his merits as a legitimate performer, the failure is not for the moment his.

Howard Lindsay, who authored the piece along with Russel Crouse, is the Benjamin Goodman who is mistaken for another man of the same name. The reflection is more on Miss Paige than on Mr. Lindsay. There are others and the best of them, I think, are Karl Lukas, Ossie Davis, Harry Shaw Lowe and Hugh Rennie.

There is nothing altogether wrong at the Morosco. And nothing altogether right. The whole thing is expert, slick and uninspired. It is not Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse at their most representative. It is not representative of anything except, perhaps, that showmanship can sometimes triumph over playwriting . . . No, I thank you.

Daily Mirror

October 4, 1951

'Remains to Be Seen' Hits The Mark for a Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse chose a misleading title for their new comedy-melodrama, which Leland Hayward brought to the Morosco Theatre last evening. They call it "Remains To Be Seen," when it should be tabbed "It's in the Bag." With close to $400,000 already in the till and orders yet to be filled, how can it miss?

Lindsay and Crouse have a knack for making the macabre seem immensely funny. They turned the trick some years ago with "Arsenic and Old Lace," and now they've done it again. While the new arrival is no "Arsenic and Old Lace," it will do until another such perfect delight comes along. It hasn't the polish or the imagination that marked its predecessor, but it packs some of the lustiest laughs you're likely to enjoy this season.

The prankster playwrights are presently concerned with a young jazz-band singer who stumbles into a fortune and a murder at the same time. She is brought to New York for a possible reconciliation with her nasty-minded and ill-tempered uncle, only to find him dead, under suspicious circumstances.

After a series of hilarious and hair-raising adventures, she finally decides to pursue her hot-music career after dividing a sizable income left her by the deceased between a do-good society and AGVA. We know that Henry Dunn, president of AGVA, will be glad to hear about this. Incidentally, the aspiring Dinah Shore finds a husband and a sizzling drummer in the person of the young and innocent manager of the hectic apartment house.

Bretaigne Windust has directed the chuckle-chiller at supersonic speed, and devised a lot of helpful business to complement the lines and situations.

Jackie Cooper, who used to be a film wonder-child, is, in the patois of the jitterbug set, both "cool" and "George," as the bewildered concierge. Translated, that means superlative.

Janis Paige, whom you may have glimpsed in several recent movies or in smart niteries, is quite wonderful as the small-time canary who would like to warble with Benny Goodman's combo. It's a difficult role to bring off, but she does it with persuasive bounce and skill.

Co-author Lindsay plays a stodgy lawyer who develops an interest in Birdland and the heiress, with effect. Warner Anderson, Karl Lukas, Harry Shaw Lowe, Ross Hertz, Madeleine Morka and Kirk Brown also merit salutes. Oh yes, the ever-reliable Ossie Davis makes a brief bit important.

"Remains to Be Seen" should prove another bonanza for Hayward, who has the golden touch. If you want to roar and shiver, you'd better rush to the Morosco box office before the line gets too long this morning. All the queues won't be at the Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds. Broadway has been needing a rousing hit, and now it has one.

New York Post

October 4, 1951

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Drama Season Is Looking Up

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, the old pros, came to the rescue of the belated drama season last night at the Morosco Theater with a bright and lively murder extravaganza called "Remains to Be Seen." Their latest ingenious concoction is certainly no important contribution to artistic playwriting, and it doesn't try to be, but as a shrewd and adroit show, attractively acted, expertly directed, and filled with all the pleasant tricks of the mystery melodrama, the music hall, and the spoof of the old-time thriller, it is thoroughly entertaining. It is the unashamed popular theater at its most professionally expert.

There is everything in it, including the mysterious secret entrance behind the book shelves, the enigmatic Japanese butler, and the noisy and bewildered cops. Not satisfied to include all of the treasured paraphernalia of the time-honored detective play, it offers such assorted exhibits as a televised prizefight, Jackie Cooper at the drums, sex in the person of Janis Paige from Hollywood, and a running gag about a policeman and a dirty book. It fools you with a surprise first-act curtain, delves learnedly into the odd world of the hot bands, and ends as a three-ring circus of excitement and fun.

Loathsome Victim

Never taking itself or its audience seriously, it tells something or other about the murder of an odious vice crusader. The loathsome fellow is found dead, apparently of natural causes, after which a knife is stuck in his back. The illustrious authors are more interested in the burlesque trappings of the mystery melodrama than in the crime itself or its solution, but they manage to extract a few thrills from it, nevertheless. The romance between a girl who sings with small-time bands and a young apartment-house superintendent, who wants to be a trap-drummer, concerns them more, but they aren't grave about this, either.

In their debonair fashion, the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse have provided what is, if I may grow technical about it, more of a show than a play. This, however, is meant to describe it, not to be scornful of what it achieves. Indeed, all that it means is that it is the deft trickery of expert showmen, rather than any notable brilliance of writing, that is the concern of the evening, and there is certainly a welcome place in a well-balanced theater for such intelligent ingenuity. It is particularly welcome when it is staged and acted so deftly.

The Production

If the acting or the staging of "Remains to Be Seen" had been lacking in the skill that competent professionals can offer, the fact that the play hasn't the satirical brilliance that made "Arsenic and Old Lace" so remarkable a tour-de-force might have proved a handicap to it. Fortunately, everything about the production seems so right that the result is almost continuous fun. It has been cast so wisely and Bretaigne Windust has staged it with such resource that the frank entertainment values of the comedy never have time to lag. It is my impression that every role is cast just as it should be.

Miss Paige, for example, is a Hollywood girl without stage experience, but she turns out to be exactly what the producers needed. In a Judy Holliday sort of part, she brings charm, humor complete credibility and the sort of frank sex excitement that the theater can certainly use. Jackie Cooper not only plays the drums expertly but manages his role with agreeable boyishness. There is an engaging performance of the book-chasing cop by Karl Lukas, and Mr. Lindsay portrays a dignified lawyer with a growing interest in the girl singer in a singularly attractive fashion that makes the old fellow sympathetic rather than fatuous. "Remains to Be Seen" brings the professionals back to the theater.